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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the results of an effort to apply a classification system developed by the Human Resources Research Organization to a set of termanal objectives in reading. The classification system contained five factors, of three levels each. Some 312 terminal objectives and 766 approximations were classified by three raters. Agreement among raters was poor at the start of the rating, but improved dramatically with practice. It was concluded that: (1) classifying objectives is a useful procedure by which to evaluate their communicability, (2) the verb is probably the most important aspect of an objective, and (3) reading objectives are no more difficult to classify than are objectives in other instructional content areas. (Author)

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Qualitative Review of Terminal Objectives in Reading

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The Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) is a nonprofit corporation established in 1969 to conduct research in the field of training and education. It is a continuation of The George Washington University Human Resources Research Office. HumRRO's general purpose is to improve human performance, particularly in organizational settings, through behavioral and social science research, development, and consultation.

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Prefatory Note

The research upon which the paper is based was done under contract with the New York State Education Department. The work was performed at HumRRO Division No. 5, El Paso, Texas (now part of the Western Division). Dr. William H. Melching was the Principal Investigator. Drs. Paul G. Whitmore, Edward W. Frederickson, and John P. Fry served as raters. Mrs. Dorothy A. Alderman performed the numerous tabulations of rater judgments.

This paper was presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting in Chicago, Illinois, April 1972. It was part of a Critique Session entitled "Functional Literacy." Dr. Thomas G. Sticht of the HumRRO Western Division was chairman.

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QUALITATIVE REVIEW OF TERMINAL OBJECTIVES IN READING

William H. Melching

A few years ago, a colleague and I set out to clarify the methods, terms, and criteria associated with behavioral objectives.[1] Based on our review of numerous sets of objectives prepared in various instructional contexts, we concluded that the most useful kind of objective was the terminal objective. We defined a terminal objective as a statement of the behavior expected of a student in a life or work performance situation. A terminal objective referred to behavior performed for its own sake. Thus, for example, while one might not copy letters of the alphabet in a life or work performance situation, he might construct words from such letters, especially if he arranged the words in a particular sequence.

Because we saw great variation in the level at which objectives were stated, we suggested a means by which terminal objectives might be meaningfully classified and/or evaluated. We offered five classification factors, each with three levels. The factors and levels are shown in Figure 1. With this classification scheme, we felt a trained reviewer could readily evaluate a set of objectives.

Classification of Terminal Objectives

Factor A: Type of Performance Unit	Factor B: Extent of Action Description	Factor C: Relevancy of Student Action	Factor D: Completeness of Structural Components	Factor E: Precision of Each Structural Component
Levels:	Levels:	Levels:	Levels:	Levels:
1. Specific Task	1. Fully Described	1. High Relevance	1. Fully Complete	1. Fully Precise
2. Generalized Skill	2. Partially Described	2. Moderate Relevance	2. Partially Complete	2. Partially Precise
3. Generalized Behavior	3. Stated Only	3. Low Relevance	3. Action Only	3. Vague

Figure 1

Recently, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) adopted our concept of the terminal objective. NYSED undertook a full-scale effort to produce terminal objectives in reading and hired Independent Learning Systems (ILS) to develop the objectives. ILS was directed to develop terminal objectives consistent with the definition we had provided.

[1] Harry L. Ammerman and William H. Melching. *The Derivation, Analysis and Classification of Instructional Objectives*, HumRRO Technical Report 66-4, May 1966.

In addition, NYSED requested that the developer produce two types of terminal objectives—a minimal set and a maximal set. The minimal set referred to reading behaviors that are required to maintain economic independence in a modern society, and to fulfill one's obligations as a parent and a citizen of the nation and community. By contrast, the maximal set referred to reading behaviors that are necessary to meet the reading requirements of tasks represented by subject areas typically offered at the beginning of secondary school.

A final requirement imposed on the developer by NYSED concerned the need to prepare a number of approximations (initially specified as four but later reduced) for each terminal objective. An approximation was defined by NYSED as "an observable instance of behavior which is less complex, less difficult, requires more external support, or has a more limited range of manifestation relative to the terminal performance level. The approximation is further identifiable as the same form or type of behavior that is specified in the terminal performance objective."

To ensure the production of acceptable objectives and to institute some quality control procedures, NYSED engaged HumRRO to review and evaluate the objectives according to the classification scheme mentioned above. This, in turn, gave us an opportunity to explore the feasibility and usefulness of the classification system.

I have made no effort to sort our experiences into categories, nor have I attempted to prepare a complete summary of the results of the classification effort. Instead I have elected to describe what we did, give a few results, and share with you some of the problems that we faced. To give you some idea of the scope of the review effort, I might mention that, excluding the objectives and approximations used in training sessions, a total of 312 terminal objectives and 766 approximations were evaluated by the raters.

The Rating Procedure

Three psychologists at the HumRRO Western Division served as raters. Each was a Ph.D. with some previous experience in preparing or evaluating objectives. None had used the Ammerman and Melching classification system, however.

Each rater was given a copy of the Ammerman and Melching report and a copy of a brief paper on the definitions and descriptions of the levels of the five A&M factors. After raters had studied these materials, they were directed to independently rate a sample of 11 terminal objectives. These objectives were constructed so that each level of each factor was a candidate rating at least once. They then met with the principal investigator, discussed the ratings, and attempted to reconcile differences. Next, each rater was given 20 objectives prepared by ILS and asked to rate them independently. After this training, they were judged ready to perform their assigned functions.

Verb Problems

The first set of objectives received for rating contained 87 objectives of the minimal set. Each objective was accompanied by four approximations. The objectives exhibited a fairly common feature—one that occasioned some distress in raters. This was the tendency for the "objective writer" to use multiple verbs to describe the desired student action. Sample objectives had occasionally possessed this feature, but this was not routine. Since the classification scheme assumes only one student action is stated, raters tried to handle the multiple verb objective by designating one verb as the prime one. However, they were not entirely successful.

Here's a somewhat exaggerated example of an objective with multiple verbs:

> Given a copy of the XYZ Buying Guide, the student will use the index to locate a specified product and will state if the product is considered acceptable or unacceptable and will correctly list at least one reason given in the Guide for this rating.

The inclination for writers to use several verbs when writing reading objectives may be peculiar to these kinds of objectives, but I doubt it. Let's look at the basic aspects of a reading objective. Presumably it requires the student to read a passage and then to behave in some way to demonstrate comprehension of what he has read. So, for example, a student might be asked to read a label on a medicine bottle and then indicate his understanding of the label by answering a question like, "What dosage should be given to a two-year old infant?" An objective might require a student to perform two or more actions such as read, locate, copy down, restate, and/or select.

Writing objectives this way is due mostly to our previous writing habits. For convenience in time and effort, we tend to serialize student actions. Unfortunately, such duality (or multiplicity) creates problems when we attempt to evaluate performance. Which action shall we assess? Which action is critical? How many different student behaviors are present?

Since actions of "read," "use," and "locate" are neither readily observable nor particularly informative, they might as well be deleted from statements. After all, if a student is given a written passage that asks him to perform in some way, it is assumed that he cannot perform appropriately unless he has read it. What the writer must do when tempted to use multiple verbs is decide which student action is critical with respect to comprehension of the written material. So, for example, instead of asking a student to "use the telephone book to locate the number of the fire department and place a call," one might state the objective as:

> Given an emergency situation requiring the services of the fire department, the student must, with the aid of the local telephone book, indicate (state) the correct number of the department.

Whether he can successfully perform the actions of placing the call is a different item of behavior.

Let's turn now to a related verb problem. This time, however, the focus is primarily on the relative specificity of the action verb. Because of earlier writing and speaking habits, the objective writer may employ verbs that are too vague. I refer here to student action verbs such as "respond correctly, reply correctly, comply with, abide by." Even "assemble correctly" can be quite vague—a fact known by every parent who has attempted to assemble a child's toy according to manufacturer's instructions.

The only solution to this problem, of course, is to require the writer to employ more specific verbs. To do this, he must first determine explicitly just what the student is expected to do. As a result, there is generally both an increase in student action specificity and a decrease in the tendency to use multiple verbs in a single objective.

Classification Results

Table 1 shows the distribution of ratings on the first batch of objectives.[1]

The values in the table are consensus ratings. That is, if at least two raters agreed on a given level for a given factor of an objective, that was the recorded rating. When each rater selected a different level for a factor, it was necessary for raters to re-examine their classifications and to reconcile differences. These efforts encouraged exposure of unique interpretations and frequently promoted unanimity among judges.

At least four values stand out in the table. First, all objectives were rated as generalized tasks (Factor A, Level 2). This is what one might logically expect of reading behaviors. Second, student action was judged as "stated only" in 70% of the cases

[1] To interpret the values in Table 1 and in subsequent tables, the reader should refer to the classification scheme shown in Figure 1.

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Table 1

Classification of 87 Terminal Objectives[a]

		Factor				
		A	B	C	D	E
Level	1	0	23	84	76	40
	2	87	2	3	10	30
	3	0	62	0	1	17

[a]The approximations were not classified according to the A&M system. Instead, they were subjected to another kind of evaluation, one not relevant to the main focus of this critique session.

(Factor B, Level 3). Third, although raters experienced difficulty with verbs, they rated student action as highly relevant in almost every case (Factor C, Level 1). Thus, the raters agreed with the developer that the reading behaviors stated in the objectives were relevant to the designated work performance situation. Fourth, the vast majority of objectives were rated as fully complete with respect to structural components (Factor D, Level 1). In terms of preciseness of components, however, the raters were not so generous. They felt that over half of the objectives could be improved in precision.

All of the evaluations cited, plus other more detailed feedback, were provided to the developer. In addition, of course, NYSED provided its own evaluation of the first batch of objectives to the developer. Armed with this information, the original objectives were scrapped, and a new attack on the preparation of objectives and approximations was undertaken. Within a short time, some 225 terminal objectives were produced by the developer; 61 were of the minimal set and 164 were of the maximal set. The number of approximations per objective now varied from two to four.[1] A total of 766 approximations were prepared.

Before giving some of the results of this new classification effort, some comments may be made about the characteristics of the new objectives. With respect to use of verbs, the new objectives and approximations were notably superior to the original ones. Statements now described one student action, and verbs describing highly specific action tended to be used. While raters experienced little difficulty rating the minimal set objectives, this was not always the case for maximal set objectives. For example, raters insisted on revising one cluster of 18 maximal set objectives dealing with "relevancy" and "motivation." They felt that the objectives, as written, assessed relevancy or attractiveness of the stimulus materials, not the capability of the student to read.

In another cluster of 13 maximal set objectives where the student was required to "write in his own words a correct definition of a concept or thing," raters rejected the terminal objective and recommended that the first approximation be stated as an objective. The raters felt that the behavior required by the approximation was more relevant to the intended work performance situation than that required by the originally stated objective. A full statement of this approximation is as follows:

> Given a prose selection from a textbook that defines a concept or thing and a statement in which the concept or thing is used incorrectly, the student will state a corrected version of the statement.

[1] One objective actually had five approximations.

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Other results of the classification effort support the contention that the minimal set objectives were easier to rate than the maximal set objectives. Before presenting some of these results, however, it should be noted that this time raters classified both terminal objectives and approximations. Thus, 991 statements were classified. As before, if at least two raters agreed on the level of a factor, that agreement was accepted and recorded. Only in instances where there was maximal disagreement among raters (i.e., each rater selected a different level for a factor) was it necessary to have raters discuss their ratings and reconcile differences.

Table 2 shows the classification results for the minimal set objectives. The most striking thing about these values is that the ratings on the first three factors show no variation. All 61 statements were viewed by the raters as being generalized tasks, partially described, and highly relevant to an intended work situation. By contrast, raters felt the completeness and precision of structural components of many of the objectives were not fully acceptable.

Table 2

Classification of 61 Minimal Set Terminal Objectives

		Factor				
		A	B	C	D	E
Level	1	0	0	61	38	23
	2	61	61	0	23	38
	3	0	0	0	0	0

Now let's look at the classifications given to the maximal set terminal objectives. They appear in Table 3. Except for the Factor C rating, the classification pattern of the maximal set objectives is not very different from that of the minimal set objectives. The difference in the intended work situation for maximal objectives versus minimal objectives probably accounts for the spread in relevancy seen in Table 3.

Tables 4 and 5 show how the approximations of the minimal and maximal sets of objectives were classified. The classification pattern of the minimal set approximations is more like that of the maximal set objectives than it is of the minimal set objectives. This is due primarily to the rating given to Factor C. Over one-third of the minimal set

Table 3

Classification of 164 Maximal Set Terminal Objectives[a]

		Factor				
		A	B	C	D	E
Level	1	0	14	84	94	39
	2	149	144	56	64	119
	3	9	0	18	0	0

[a]Because six of the objectives were viewed as identical to a seventh objective, they were deleted and not rated.

Table 4

Classification of 200 Minimal Set Approximations

Level	Factor A	Factor B	Factor C	Factor D	Factor E
1	0	1	131	135	99
2	200	199	47	65	101
3	0	0	22	0	0

Table 5

Classification of 566 Maximal Set Approximations[a]

Level	Factor A	Factor B	Factor C	Factor D	Factor E
1	0	0	159	358	239
2	492	477	318	170	289
3	36	51	51	0	0

[a]Thirteen of the approximations were judged to be better terminal objectives than the objectives originally stated, and they were not included in this table. Also, 25 other approximations were not classified either because they were judged as incongruent with their associated objectives or because the objectives to which they belonged were deleted.

approximations were judged as being only moderate or low in relevance. Table 2 shows that none of the minimal set objectives obtained these ratings; all were judged highly relevant in student action.

The classification pattern of the maximal set approximations appears to be quite similar to the pattern of the maximal set objectives. Some minor variations can be found, but their meaning is questionable.

Maximal Disagreement

One final bit of information relates to the proportion of instances in which raters evidenced maximal disagreement in their judgments. A maximal disagreement was defined as any instance in which each rater assigned a different level for a given factor. (See Table 6.)

Whether the first 116 objectives (and their 403 approximations) were infinitely more difficult than the remaining objectives, or whether there is simply a pronounced practice effect cannot be determined. But the drop in number of disagreements from start to finish is striking. Note too, that not a single maximal disagreement was recorded when raters were judging the minimal set objectives.

Table 6

Incidence of Maximal Disagreement Among Raters

Type of Statement	Number of Statements	Number of Disagreement Opportunities[a]	Actual Number of Disagreements	Percent of Disagreements
Maximal Objectives First Group	116	580	68	11.7
Maximal Approximations First Group	403	2015	368	18.3
Minimal Objectives	61	305	0	0.0
Minimal Approximations	200	1000	8	.8
Maximal Objectives Last Group	48	240	1	.4
Maximal Approximations Last Group	160	800	2	.3

[a] Since each statement was rated on five factors, the number of opportunities for maximal disagreement was obtained by multiplying the number of statements in a group by five.

Conclusions

The following conclusions appear warranted:

(1) Raters can learn to apply the A&M classification system, and extended practice increases their skill.

(2) The act of classifying objectives is an effective way to examine the communicability of objectives.

(3) The classification system provides useful information by which to evaluate objectives.

(4) The verb is probably the most important aspect of an objective, especially in judging the relevancy of the learner's behavior to the work performance situation.

(5) Reading objectives are no more difficult to classify than are objectives in other instructional content areas.